

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MEDELLIN 0035

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SUBJECT: PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES BEGIN CAMPAIGN TO
ACHIEVE NATIONAL POLITICAL STATURE

SUMMARY: THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT OF J. EMILIO VALDERRAMA HAS BEGUN A CAMPAIGN TO ORGANIZE IN VARIOUS COLOMBIAN DEPARTMENTS WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF ESTABLISHING ITSELF AS A NATIONAL POLITICAL FORCE, WINNING OVER THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND REMAKING IT A PROGRESSIVE IMAGE. VALDERRAMA'S STRATEGY IS TO ESTABLISH THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT AS THE MOST AGGRESSIVE AND VOCAL CRITICS OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION AND THEREBY TO CAPTURE FOR ITSELF THE HALF-MILLION OR MORE FLOATING PROTEST OR ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE WHICH HAS HISTORICALLY EXISTED IN COLOMBIA. MOVEMENT LEADERS INDICATED THAT THE GROUP WILL SHORTLY BEGIN LAUNCHING SYSTEMATIC ATTACKS AGAINST THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION. WHILE VALDERRAMA FORMERLY HAD A POLITICAL BASE IN ANTIOQUIA, HE WAS BADLY DEFEATED BY TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP IN 1972; THE CURRENT LACK OF A POLITICAL POWER BASE SEEMS TO CONSTITUTE THE MOVEMENT'S MOST CRITICAL WEAKNESS. THE MOVEMENT'S SPARSE REPRESENTATION IN THE NATIONAL CONGRESS AND ITS LACK

OF NATIONAL FIGURES WILL GREATLY HINDER THE MOVEMENT'S EFFORT TO CLAIM NATIONAL ATTENTION FOR ITS CRITICISMS OF THE LOPEZ

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GOVERNMENT, THE KEY TO ITS DRIVE FOR NATIONAL POLITICAL STATURE.

WHILE THE MOVEMENT DOES APPEAR TO BE RESPONSIVE TO CERTAIN NATIONAL POLITICAL CONCERNS AND TRENDS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE RATHER SMALL AND ESSENTIALLY (THUS FAR) REGIONAL MOVEMENT DOMINATED BY VALDERRAMA WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. WHILE THE ANTIOQUIAN GROUP MAY HAVE HAD THE PROGRESSIVE IDEA FIRST, IT SEEMS IMPROBABLE THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO RESERVE THAT APPROACH EXCLUSIVELY FOR ITSELF. END SUMMARY

1. THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT OF J. EMILIO VALDERRAMA, UNDAUNTED BY PAST SETBACKS, IS ON THE MOVE AGAIN. OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE CONSULATE HAS CONVERSED WITH SEVERAL OF THE MOVEMENT'S LEADING ANTIOQUIAN FIGURES, INCLUDING LIDER MAXIMO "JOTA" EMILIO. OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MOVEMENT CONSULTED INCLUDE SENATOR JUAN GOMEZ MARTINEZ, HEIR OF ONE HALF (THE PROGRESSIVE HALF) OF EL COLOMBIANO; GUILLERMO MARQUEZ VARGAS, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MOVEMENT; AND FORMER REPRESENTATIVES ALBERTO VELASQUEZ MARTINEZ AND LUIS TIRADO VELEZ.

2. VALDERRAMA AND HIS GROUP TOLD THE CONSULATE THAT THE LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES ARE TO ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A NATIONAL POLITICAL FORCE AND TO WIN OVER THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, MODERNIZING THE PARTY IN ITS OWN PROGRESSIVE IMAGE. VALDERRAMA EMPHASIZED THAT HE HAS NO INTENTION OF FORMING AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL PARTY. AS THE INITIAL STEPS IN PURSUIT OF ITS LOFTY OBJECTIVES, THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES WILL ATTEMPT OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS TO HOLD CONSTITUTIVE CONVENTIONS IN SIX OR SEVEN DEPARTMENTS, NOT COUNTING ANTIOQUIA WHERE THE MOVEMENT IS ALREADY FORMALLY CONSTITUTED. THE MOVEMENT BELIEVES THAT THE DEPARTMENTS MOST RECEPTIVE TO A PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT IN ADDITION TO ANTIOQUIA ARE CALDAS, CUNDINAMARCA, SANTANDER, THE SPECIAL DISTRICT OF BOGOTA, CORDOBA AND SUCRE. ONCE A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IS ESTABLISHED IN THESE AND PERHAPS OTHER DEPARTMENTS THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT WILL HOLD A NATIONAL CONVENTION BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR, MAYBE BY LATE SUMMER.

3. THE BASIC STRATEGY CONCEIVED BY JOTA EMILIO FOR DEVELOPING
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THE MOVEMENT INTO A NATIONAL POLITICAL FORCE IS SIMPLY TO MOVE INTO SYSTEMATIC AND VOCIFEROUS OPPOSITION TO THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, CRITICIZING GOC PERFORMANCE IN ALL AREAS WHERE THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE VULNERABLE. VALDERRAMA SAID THE CRITICISMS WOULD NOT BE MINDLESS, AS HE CHARACTERIZED THE CRITICISMS OF ANAPO AND UNO, BUT RATHER WOULD CONSTRUCTIVE. NEVERTHELESS, THE STRATEGY IS TO ESTABLISH THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES AS THE MOST AGGRESSIVE AND VOCAL CRITICS OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION.

4. VALDERRAMA REASONS THAT THERE IS A VERY LARGE FLOATING PROTEST OR ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE IN COLOMBIA. THE PROTEST VOTE HISTORICALLY HAS BEEN MORE THAN 500,000 AND IN RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS HAS BEEN CAPTURED BY JORGE LEYVA, LOPEZ HIMSELF AS THE MRL CANDIDATE, ROJAS PINILLA AND, LESS DRAMATICALLY, MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS DE MORENO. VALDERRAMA ARGUES THAT THIS LARGE ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE WILL INEVITABLY BECOME AN ANTI-LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION VOTE AND WILL BE UP FOR GRABS. HE BELIEVES THAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ AFTER ONLY SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE HAS ALREADY LOST SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORT ALL ACROSS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SPECTRUM, INCLUDING FROM LABOR, THE MIDDLE-CLASS AND ECONOMIC LEADERS. THE POLITICAL GROUP THAT ESTABLISHES ITSELF AS A TOUGH CRITIC OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO CAPTURE THAT PROTEST VOTE. HE APPEARS TO BELIEVE THAT ANAPO IS NO LONGER A VIABLE POLITICAL FORCE AND THAT UNO WILL REMAIN A MINOR LEFTIST FACTION. THE LIBERALS ARE IN POWER AND MUZZLED, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CARLOS LLERAS. HE CONSIDERS THAT THE TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP IS COWED BY DEFEAT AND HOPEFUL OF RETAINING CRUMBS OF FAVOR AND PATRONAGE FROM THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT, AND THEREFORE IT HAS DELIBERATELY ADOPTED A NON-CRITICAL POSTURE. VALDERRAMA THUS SEES THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES AS BEING IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO CAPTURE THE INEVITABLE ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE.

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5. VALDERRAMA SAID THAT THE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL TASK FOR THE MOVEMENT, IN ADDITION TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT ALREADY MENTIONED IS TO BEGIN AN OFFENSIVE OF CRITICISM AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. IN FACT THE OFFENSIVE BEGAN LAST WEEK IN ANTIOQUIA WITH A LONG PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE COMMUNIQUE CRITICIZING A HOST OF ALLEGED SHORTCOMINGS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTIOQUIA AND CITY OF MEDELLIN ADMINISTRATIONS. MOVEMENT LEADERS INDICATE THAT THE GROUP WILL SHORTLY BEGIN LAUNCHING ATTACKS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AGAINST PRESIDENT LOPEZ.

6. LOOKING AHEAD TO 1978 AND THE MECHANICS OF CASHING IN ON THE PROTEST VOTE, THE MOVEMENT LEADERS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY SOMEWHAT VAGUE. HOWEVER, THEY SEEM TO BE GENERALLY BANKING ON AN UNPOPULAR TURBAY LIBERAL CANDIDACY WITH A PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE-SPONSORED CANDIDATE (SUCH AS CARLOS LLERAS OR MISAEL PASTRANA) DRAWING LARGE NUMBERS OF LIBERAL VOTERS WHICH WILL BE JOINED WITH THE PROGRESSIVE'S OWN SUPPORT WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND WITH THE FLOATING PROTEST VOTE.

7. COMMENT: WITH THE ABOVE SCENARIO THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES HAVE CERTAINLY EMBARKED UPON A MOST AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING. THERE IS LITTLE IN THEIR PAST RECORD TO INDICATE THAT THEY CAN PULL IT OFF. THEIR MOST CRITICAL WEAKNESS IS THAT THEY HAVE NO POLITICAL POWER BASE, EITHER IN ANTIOQUIA OR ELSEWHERE THAT THE CONSULATE IS CONFIDENTIAL

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AWARE OF. THEY DID HAVE A POWER BASE IN ANTIOQUIA AT ONE TIME; VALDERRAMA WITH THE CRUCIAL BACKING OF EX-PRESIDENT OSPINA ROSE TO POWER IN ANTIOQUIAN CONSERVATIVE POLITICS IN THE 1960'S, BECOMING VICE PRESIDENT OF THE ANTIOQUIAN CONSERVATIVE DIRECTORATE/ (DCA) IN 1962 AND PRESIDENT IN 1965, A POSITION HE HELD UNTIL 1972. AS PRESIDENT OF THE DCA HE GRADUALLY BROUGHT THE ORGAN UNDER HIS PERSONAL DOMINATION BY FILLING THE DCA MEMBERSHIP WITH HIS FOLLOWERS, WINNING THE ENMITY OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP IN THE PROCESS. AFTER HE FINALLY BROKE DEFINITELY WITH EX-PRESIDENT OSPINA AROUND 1971, REPORTEDLY ACCUSED BY THE LATTER OF BEING OVER-AMBITIOUS AND DISLOYAL, THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP BACKED BY OSPINA FORMED A DISSIDENT ELECTORAL SLATE IN 1972 AND CHALLENGED THE OFFICIAL DCA SLATE CONTROLLED BY VALDERRAMA. THE RESULT WAS A STUNNING VALDERRAMA DEFEAT BY A 3 TO 1 MARGIN.

8. VALDERRAMA WAS FRUSTRATED AGAIN IN 1973/74 IN HIS EFFORTS TO OBTAIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION FOR PROGRESSIVE HERNAN JARAMILLO OCAMPO. IN ANTIOQUIA IN 1974 THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES DID NOT CHALLENGE THE DCA, NOW CONTROLLED BY OSPINISTAS AND ALVARISTAS, DECIDING TO STAY WITHIN THE FOLD AND HOPE

FOR SOME FAVORABLE SLOTS ON THE ELECTORAL LISTS. THE DCA GAVE THE PROGRESSIVES VERY SLIM PICKINGS (ONLY ONE SENATOR) AND FLATLY REFUSED TO INCLUDE VALDERRAMA ANYWHERE ON THE LISTS. FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES BROKE WITH THE DCA; THEY HAVE NO STATUS WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND WERE GIVEN NO APPOINTMENTS WHATEVER IN THE DEPARTMENTAL OR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS. WHILE THE OWNERSHIP SPLIT OF EL COLOMBIANO ASSURES THE MOVEMENT OF EVEN-HANDED COVERAGE (VIS A VIS THE REGULAR CONSERVATIVE PARTY) IN ANTIOQUIA, THE GROUP HAS NO ACCESS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS IN BOGOTA. WITH ONLY A SMALL HANDFULL OF SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES IN THE NATIONAL CONGRESS IT IS NOT GOING TO BE EASY FOR THE MOVEMENT TO CLAIM NATIONAL ATTENTION FOR ITS CRITICISMS OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, THE KEY TO THEIR ASPIRATION OF OBTAINING NATIONAL STATURE.

9. GIVEN SUCH OBSTACLES, IT IS TEMPTING TO DISMISS THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES OUT OF HAND, AS DO REGULAR CONSERVATIVE LEADERS IN ANTIOQUIA. HOWEVER, THE MOVEMENT DOES SEEM TO BE RESPONSIVE TO CERTAIN

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POLITICAL TRENDS AND CONCERNS IN COLOMBIAN POLITICS: A MODERNIZED CONSERVATIVE PARTY, THE SEARCH FOR AN ATTRACTIVE, MODERATE CONSERVATIVE (OR COALITION) CANDIDATE FIGURE, A CRITICAL BUT RESPONSIBLE OPPOSITION. THE BASIC QUESTION IS WHETHER THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT, WHICH IS ACTUALLY A RATHER SMALL REGIONAL CLIQUE HEAVILY DOMINATED BY J. EMILIO VALDERRAMA, IS REALLY LIKELY TO BE IN A POSITION TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NATIONAL POLITICAL TRENDS. IT SEEMS MORE PROBABLE THAT STRONGER FORCES WITHIN THE NATIONAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY WILL RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR MODERNIZING THE PARTY'S IMAGE AND FOR FINDING AN ATTRACTIVE MODERATE OR PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATE CAPABLE OF ATTRACTING SOME LIBERAL AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTING STRENGTH. WHILE THE ANTIOQUIAN GROUP MAY HAVE HAD THE PROGRESSIVE IDEA FIRST, IT SEEMS RATHER UNLIKELY THAT IT CAN RESERVE THAT APPROACH EXCLUSIVELY FOR ITSELF AND RIDE IT ALL THE WAY TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE. IT IS, FINALLY, AN EXERCISE IN PRETENSION FOR THE PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES TO ALLUDE TO "SPONSORING" CARLOS LLERAS OR MISAAEL PASTRANA. PERHAPS THE MOST THE MOVEMENT CAN REALISTICALLY ASPIRE TO IS TO BE INCLUDED AS PART OF A LARGER COALITION WHICH A BIG-LEAGUE NATIONAL POLITICAL FIGURE SUCH AS LLERAS OR PASTRANA MIGHT FORM AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME IN THE FUTURE.

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